



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

CHERRI BRANSON
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 5

Memorandum

February 6, 2014

To: Council President Craig Rice
Council Vice President George Leventhal

Re: FY15 Capital Budget and FY15-20 Capital Improvements Program

I am writing to you regarding the FY15 Capital Budget and FY15-20 Capital Improvements Program (CIP). Since my appointment to the Montgomery County Council, I have heard from many residents about their thoughts on the CIP. I would like to ask for the Council's support on three specific projects that are especially important to District 5 residents: Old Blair Auditorium Reuse; Metropolitan Branch Trail; and Jesup Blair House.

Old Blair Auditorium Reuse (P361113)

The Council has worked with residents and community leaders, including representatives from the Old Blair Auditorium Project, Inc., on strategies to reopen the Elizabeth Stickley (Old Blair) Auditorium's doors as a multi-use facility that can accommodate musical and theatrical performances, after-school programs, and school and community events. In 2007, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) completed façade improvements at Silver Spring International Middle School, including fresh paint, new windows, screens for the utility equipment and new handrails. In 2008, a feasibility study was conducted, which led the Council to include this project in the FY11-16 CIP. In the approved FY13-18 CIP, the \$7.6 million project was scheduled for completion in FY17.

To the disappointment of residents and arts advocates, funding for the Old Blair Auditorium Reuse project was pushed out of the County Executive's recommended FY15-20 CIP. Further, the project's cost has somehow escalated to \$12.9 million. I plan to ask Executive Branch staff for the justification for the project's delay, as well as the reasoning for the steep increase in cost.

In addition, the County's District 20 State Delegation worked to get a \$600,000 bond bill passed in the Maryland General Assembly in 2005. The Council supported the extension of this bond bill in 2007, and many subsequent times, so that the matching funds could be appropriated for the project. I am concerned that if the county does not move forward with this project, we will be leaving this State funding on the table.

Montgomery County Council, 100 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, MD 20850
240-777-7960 or 240-777-7900 TTY 240-777-7914
Councilmember.Branson@montgomerycountymd.gov

The Old Blair Auditorium Reuse project will truly be a community asset that has the potential to benefit the greater Silver Spring area and Montgomery County. A renovated Old Blair would restore a beloved destination for arts performances, and provide an essential community use space. Not only is it just a few blocks from downtown, but it will also be located at the planned Wayne Avenue Purple Line stop. I ask for your support for this project.

Metropolitan Branch Trail (P501110)

As you know, the Metropolitan Branch Trail project is an important off-road facility that would be part of a larger system of non-motorized trails throughout the region. It is a critical link for pedestrians and bicyclists traveling to, from, and through downtown Silver Spring. It would create a more bicycle-friendly Silver Spring, facilitate multimodal access to the new Transit Center, and contribute to the revitalization of the area.

After years of little progress, the Council accelerated project design and construction in 2010, and restored the funding in the FY13-18 CIP. After the schedule was pushed back for this \$12.1 million project last year to a completion date of FY17 due to issues with a property owner along the alignment, the County Executive's recommended FY15-20 CIP proposes yet another delay to FY18. I ask you to please join me in advocating to get this project back on schedule so we can complete this essential connection for all of our residents.

Jesup Blair House Restoration (*Not currently in FY15-20 CIP*)

The Jesup Blair House, owned by the Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) is a historic resource built in 1850 by Silver Spring's founder, Francis Preston Blair, for his son. However, the current structure is now much different from the original form. Since the contract ended with the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) and the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA), it has been vacant and is now leaking, moldy, and has holes in the floor.

Since 2010, M-NCPPC has been working to find a way to restore this property. I asked Council staff to work with these three agencies regarding the renovations needed to simply clean and stabilize the building, which is about \$450,000. I would like the Council to discuss potential options and the value of restoring this historic building for future interpretative use.

Thank you in advance for your consideration on these matters. Please feel free to speak with me if you have any questions regarding this request.

Sincerely,



Cherri Branson
Councilmember – District 5

c: Councilmembers
Timothy Firestone, Chief Administrative Officer
Françoise Carrier, Chair, Montgomery County Planning Board
Steve Farber, County Council Administrator

Montgomery County Council, 100 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, MD 20850
240-777-7960 or 240-777-7900 TTY 240-777-7914
Councilmember.Branson@montgomerycountymd.gov